



Easy, Tiger

Sex addiction is no myth – but it's time male celebrity horndogs stopped hijacking the condition, says red-blooded male Nick Scott

Imagine a portly businessman, bloated by foie gras and fine wine, blaming his tumescent paunch and acute gout on “an eating disorder”. Or how about a red-eyed reveller, struggling into work on a Monday morning after a two-day cocaine binge, shaking like a dog defecating red-hot razor blades, then expecting his colleagues to accept “drug dependency” as a decent excuse.

Neither defence really washes, does it? So I can only imagine the collective dismay of womankind when Tiger Woods teed up a medically sanctioned excuse for the multiple extramarital transgressions that emerged late last year — “I’m a sex addict” — then skulked off to shelter from the media storm at the Pine Grove clinic in Mississippi. If reports are true that his long-suffering wife, Elin Maria Pernilla Nordegren, insisted on the treatment, perhaps she’s as much in denial as he is.

In the wake of that fateful car crash last November, Woods’ trial-by-newspaper charge sheet read like a salacious version of *The Sound Of Music* ditty: “Girl-on-girl action and drugged satisfaction; punitive spanking and gentle hair yanking; sixty-grand escorts and hot porn-star flings” — these, it turned out, were a few of his favourite things.

Also revealed were the odd church carpark frolic, text messages that sounded like they’d been written by a sexually deviant fifth Wiggle (“Send me something very naughty”) and a penchant for the sort of

waitresses who, at the risk of sounding misogynistic, make the painted slappers in *Zoo* look like French underwear models.

Bad boys

In fairness, Woods isn’t the first celebrity swordsman to issue the ultimate horndog’s Get-Out-Of-Jail-Free card. It was Michael Douglas who introduced the term “sex addiction” into common parlance, when he was admitted to an Arizona rehab in 1990, during his first marriage to Diandra. (Who would question Catherine Zeta-Jones’ subsequent prenup clause awarding her \$3 million for every infidelity?)

The triple-x files of David Duchovny’s private life were also flung open at the end of 2008 when his wife Tea Leoni found out about his extramarital antics and threatened him with divorce. British comedian and proud pants man Russell Brand, meanwhile, has admitted to spending a week at a centre for sexual addiction in Philadelphia to curb his penchant for lap dancers and prostitutes. And what of our very own Shane Warne?

Sexual addiction is clearly no myth. South Pacific Private Hospital in NSW now treats dozens of sex-addicted patients each year with cognitive behavioural therapy and libido-reducing drugs. While 75 to 80 per cent of sufferers are male, the condition doesn’t discriminate according to age or background. Unlike alcoholics and drug addicts, “sexoholics” suffer not from a substance addiction but from a “process addiction”, which, as with gambling, has a biochemical element linked to the release of dopamine in the brain. “What we refer to as nymphomania in women, or satyriasis in men, is to do with out-of-control behaviour, preoccupied thinking and obsessive fantasies,” explains psychologist Michael Burge, a member of the Australian College of Clinical Psychologists. “These often mask underlying psychological problems like depression or suppression.”

The opportunist

But can Woods claim a legit psychological dependency on rumpy-pumpy? “Tiger Woods’ rooting around doesn’t necessarily mean he’s got a sexual addiction,” says Melbourne-based psychologist Marcus Squirrel. “It’s not about frequency and the number of people he hooks up with; in order for us to call him a sex addict, he’d need to be experiencing withdrawal symptoms whenever he’s not engaging in sexual activity. His condition would cause him constant distress, or functional problems in terms of interacting socially. The patients I see, their lives are effectively destroyed by this condition.”

So is Woods’ checking-in at the nooky clinic an act of PR alchemy, transforming guilt into victimhood? “It’s hard to say without assessing him properly in person,” says Squirrel. “But he may just be being opportunistic — he’s fairly good-looking and he’s got access to a lot of different partners.”

Burge points to a number of studies on why men visit prostitutes: “It seems a lot of it has to do with instant gratification and the simple fact that they can,” he says. “Their moral values are the point of focus, here, rather than an addiction or dysfunction.” Couple these findings with the fact that men who are told they’ve achieved greatness have higher testosterone than a boss-whipped everyman, and it seems that Woods is simply doing the same as the Shane Warnes and Russell Brands —

cashing in their “Wonka ticket to a sex factory”, as Brand has described fame.

Victim or vice?

Many men out there would justify Woods’ actions without medicalising them. I’ve lost count of the number of male serial cheats I’ve witnessed slapping pub tables while insisting monogamy is a mere cultural construct; that all us blokes are would-be Lotharios, Don Juans and Casanovas, and that only opportunity, or lack of, imposes our sexual boundaries. It’s an argument with some merit — most men have a libido that makes Scrappy-Doo look docile. Why, in the name of Berlusconi’s balls, are 99.9 per cent of sex workers female? Any sex therapist will tell you that, while women complain about lack of intimacy, guys invariably moan about lack of frequency.

But if an insurmountable biological imperative for men to be polygamous exists, why do so many blokes participate in fulfilling relationships? Or, as Squirrel puts it, “Most of us guys, when we see somebody hot, would love to jump their bones — but we can manage that urge, and it doesn’t put us at risk of upsetting the relationship we’re in.”

No, evidence suggests that Woods is simply acting on a ubiquitous male impulse with the prolificacy that his wealth and celebrity allow. The degree of human vice is directly proportional to opportunity.

And the consequences of vice follow the same macrocosmic principle. The world number-one golfer has endured a huge drop in public approval ratings (from 85 per cent in 2005 to 33 per cent at the end of last year, according to a

USA Today/Gallup poll). The financial fallout — Woods was the first sportsman to earn more than \$1 billion — is enough to make a bean-counter weep.

And what of us everymen who repeatedly stray? We risk spending our tender years sliding \$50 notes down the fishnet tights of struggling students who are repulsed by us, while smarter blokes enjoy roasts and the *Antiques Roadshow* with our ex-wives. Not as dramatic as Woods’ downfall, maybe — but enough to make any man eyeing the exciting world of infidelity from the safe haven of domestic bliss think (with his big head instead of his small head) before making a costly mistake of the heart. **wh**

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ADULTERY HALL OF SHAME

MICHAEL DOUGLAS The *Fatal Attraction* actor coined the term “sex addict” when he publicly admitted to his problem in 1990.

BILL CLINTON The charismatic US President caused a stir in 1998 when he perjured himself (saying he didn’t have sex with a White House intern), while being sued by another woman for sexual harassment.

SHANE WARNE Serial text offender Warne has been caught with his pants down so often that it’s no longer shocking news.

DAVID DUCHOVNY A case of art imitating life? The actor, who plays a sex-obsessed man in *Californication*, had treatment in 2008.

TIGER WOODS The golfer’s approval rating plummeted and he lost his family’s support after his sexual transgressions came to light.

RUSSELL BRAND The English larrikin admits fame has brought many opportunities — claiming to have bedded 80 women a month.

